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TO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 6115
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS PRIORITY 4387
RUEHBM/AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST PRIORITY 0190
RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KYIV PRIORITY 8254
RUEHLJ/AMEMBASSY LJUBLJANA PRIORITY 5787
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 8334
RUEHVJ/AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO PRIORITY 0125
RUEHSQ/AMEMBASSY SKOPJE PRIORITY 6035
RUEHSF/AMEMBASSY SOFIA PRIORITY 2072
RUEHTI/AMEMBASSY TIRANA PRIORITY 2253
RUEHVB/AMEMBASSY ZAGREB PRIORITY 1763
INFO RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PRIORITY 0991
RUEHPOD/AMEMBASSY PODGORICA PRIORITY 1482
RUEHCH/AMEMBASSY CHISINAU PRIORITY 9732
RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI PRIORITY 9047

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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [AL](#) [BK](#) [HR](#) [MK](#) [MW](#) [SR](#) [TU](#) [BU](#) [SI](#) [RO](#) [UP](#)
SUBJECT: ACCEPTING MONTENEGRO AS A MEMBER IN THE
SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE DEFENSE MINISTERIAL (SEDM)

¶1. (U) This is an action request; please see paragraph 6.

¶2. (SBU) BACKGROUND: At the Southeastern Europe Defense Ministerial Coordinating Committee (SEDM-CC) meeting held September 25, 2008, Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy indicated they would not support Montenegro's joining SEDM without Serbia joining at the same time. All eleven SEDM member nations besides the U.S. took a similar position at the previous SEDM-CC meeting in Skopje, April 2008. While Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, and Serbia have observer status, Montenegro and Serbia have both formally requested membership.

¶3. (SBU) Montenegro is qualified to be a fully-participating member and should receive an invitation to join SEDM. Montenegro is eager to integrate into Euro-Atlantic institutions and contribute to regional peace, stability and security. Members, in keeping with NATO practice, should be judged on their own merits and membership should not be linked to another country's status. The U.S. welcomes the membership of any qualified member but is not willing to support Serbia's membership without Belgrade's formal assurance not to block the membership of other qualified countries, including Kosovo.

¶4. (SBU) Due to the linkage issue at the SEDM-CC September Meeting, the issue of new members was not placed on the agenda for the October 7-8 SEDM Ministerial. During informal discussions with Bulgaria, Italy, and Greece prior to the Ministerial, Greece indicated to Embassy Athens it would be willing to change its position and allow Montenegro to join without linkage to Serbia. Bulgaria and Italy indicated it was too late for them to consider altering their position.

¶5. (U) OBJECTIVES: We would like to take advantage of the immediate post-ministerial period to press member countries once again to agree to placing the issue of new members on the agenda of the next SEDM-CC (expected to be April 2009) and to support Montenegro's membership without linkage to Serbia.

¶6. (U) SEDM member country posts, particularly Embassies Athens, Sofia and Rome, may draw on points below with appropriate host country officials:

-- We are disappointed that Montenegro was not invited to

join SEDM at Lake Ohrid. Montenegro earned an invitation to join the Southeastern Europe Defense Ministerial (SEDM) and is qualified to be a fully-participating member.

-- Montenegro's membership aspirations should not be linked to Serbia's. Montenegro is an independent state and is eager to integrate into NATO and the EU.

-- Montenegro has made considerable progress in a short time toward its NATO aspirations. It is working constructively with regional and international partners and is contributing to overall regional stability. It has clearly demonstrated its readiness for SEDM membership.

-- Our position on SEDM is that any qualified country should be able to join. This is also true for Serbia, whose participation we would welcome.

-- At the same time, it is important that no country from the region be excluded from membership.

-- Should Kosovo be qualified in the future to become a member, we would expect Serbia not to block its membership.

-- Unfortunately, Serbia has publicly stated it opposes Kosovo's membership in international and regional organizations.

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-- Therefore, until such time as Serbia is prepared to provide formal assurance that it will not block the membership of any future-qualified country, including Kosovo, the U.S. cannot support Serbia's membership.

-- The door remains open to Serbia's membership in the future should circumstances change.

-- We would like to see agreement at the next SEDM-CC in April to formally consider new memberships and to issue an invitation for Montenegro to join.

RICE